

CAMBRIDGE STREET

pathway to the heart of boston

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For many visitors to Boston, Cambridge Street provides the entry way to the heart of the City. Few American cities could boast as dramatic and impressive an approach: a broad avenue starting at the river and rising gently to the center of the city as it skirts Beacon Hill. It is a major and inherently monumental pathway linking the Charles River with its bridges and drives to the heart of Boston, equal in width and potential grandeur to Commonwealth Avenue or the Champs Elysees. Yet today, this street is harsh and unpleasant, marred by billboards, parking lots and gas stations — glaringly hot in summer, bitterly windy in winter.





Along the southern edge of Cambridge Street lies residential Beacon Hill, an historic district protected by sentiment and legislation to within 40 feet of Cambridge Street. As the Hill meets the Street, however, its edge is now defined by deteriorating buildings of ragged heights and inharmonious styles, occupied by commercial activities that often clash with each other and do not provide the kinds of services needed for this urban neighborhood or prospering business. Future developments within this 40 foot strip must strengthen and clarify this edge, give it a better definition and a surer economic base.

On the other side, Cambridge Street is hardly defined at all. Even upon completion of the new West End, this edge of the street could be lost in the vast sprawl of parking lots and freestanding buildings of different heights set back at varying distances from the street. This side of the street will reflect, as present development plans proceed, a more loosely composed and diverse set of land uses: the Massachusetts General Hospital complex, the new West End Shopping Center with the residential towers beyond, a new branch library, the historic Harrison Grey Otis House, and Old West Church. This side contrasts interestingly with the southern side in scale, type of land uses, building forms and materials, and the pattern of intersecting streets. The centuries confront each other across Cambridge Street.

This is the pathway that will climax at the new City Hall and the dramatic structures of the new Government Center.

HOW CAN THE POTENTIALS OF CAMBRIDGE STREET BE REALIZED

Cambridge Street today represents a unique opportunity for planned action through the recognition, understanding and guidance of the inevitable forces of change at work on both sides of this major pathway. A civic design challenge of such major proportions can only be met by the execution of an overall master plan for this important street and its intersections; design controls over the street furnishings and landscaping; zoning controls over the buildings fronting on it; support of municipal improvement programs; and perhaps most important, the cooperation of every group of interests along the street.

Through the vehicle of urban renewal, we have one of the basic tools with which to build upon the potentials of Cambridge Street. The initial and most important step would be the creation of a tree-lined pedestrian way stretching along the sunlit northern side of the street, an uninterrupted continuity of green from the Charles River Esplanade to the new City Hall Plaza. Such a tree-lined way will give unity and definition to the loosely organized northern side of the street and lead the eye of the stroller and motorist along its colonnaded path. It will give the entrance way to the new Government Center significance and beauty.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO THE CITY

The City of Boston has responded to similar opportunities in the past. The Public Garden and Common, Commonwealth Avenue and the Charles

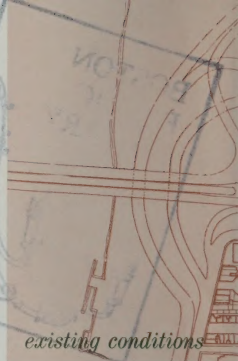
River Esplanade give to our city beauty and charm. By executing this proposal for Cambridge Street, we can accomplish a work of broad scale civic design which would be of parallel significance today.

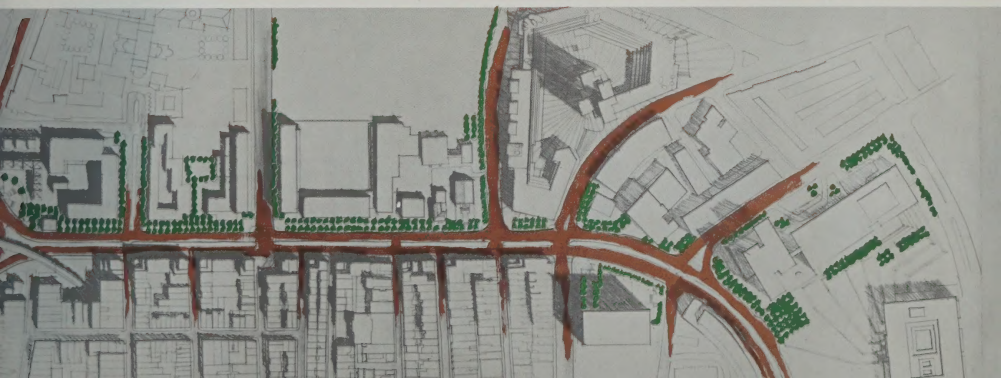
WHAT THIS MEANS TO CAMBRIDGE STREET PROPERTY OWNERS

The creation of an attractive and functional front door for, and the strengthening of ties between the various commercial and service facilities on both sides of the street will enable these interests to serve their buying public more advantageously. Pedestrians and motorists will tend to choose this way of approaching the city. West End and Beacon Hill residents will gravitate to the pedestrian way. All will shop. Non-commercial owners, the hospitals, the governmental and historic buildings and the nearby West End and Beacon Hill residential structures will gain a street frontage which will enhance the livability and raise the value of their properties.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO THE MOTORIST AND PEDESTRIAN

The continuity of the tree-lined boulevard will provide a sense of direction and drama. The motorist and pedestrian will be safely divided from each other, each having opportunity to enjoy the intrinsic beauty of the foliage during the changing seasons. Along the pedestrian way, the width is generous enough to provide spaces for sitting, as well as safe and shaded passageways for walking.







— 20' —

this is what it could be



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Because of the existing 15 foot right of way on the northern side of Cambridge Street, a tree-lined pedestrian way of the generous thirty-five foot width needed to give proper scale can be provided without intruding more than twenty feet into properties on this side of the street. Through the process of urban renewal, it should be possible to finance this important first stage of a major civic improvement with a minimum of direct cost to the city.